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WORLD-POLITICS.

WASHINGTON.

WASHINGTON, *March, 1907.*

THE topic most discussed in Washington since the adjournment of the Fifty-ninth Congress is the apparent modification of the President's attitude toward the great railway corporations, and the corresponding change in the view taken of Mr. Roosevelt by many railway managers of long experience and recognized ability.

It would be easy to exaggerate the extent of the alteration on both sides, but that there are signs of a possible approach to an understanding, if not to cooperation, seems indisputable.

That the steam-railway presidents, with the conspicuous exception of the late Mr. Cassatt of the Pennsylvania, strenuously opposed the Railway Rate bill enacted during the first session of the Fifty-ninth Congress is well known, and it is doubtless true that most of them still regard that law as mischievous rather than useful.

Nevertheless, there is a growing tendency on the part of railroad men to prefer Federal control to State control, a tendency caused by the flood of anti-railway legislation passed, or threatened, in over a score of States. The determination evinced in many States to reduce the rate chargeable for the transportation of passengers to two cents per mile, without any equitable reference to the volume of passenger travel or to the average distance traversed by passengers, has naturally provoked railway managers to retaliate by reducing signally the number of trains and the rate of speed. The fact that on many lines the net profit accruing from passenger traffic is relatively insignificant, and that on some lines, or sections of lines, the passenger business is actually transacted at a loss, has been overlooked by some State legis-

latures in their haste to absolve themselves from the reproach of neglecting to use their powers of regulation. The interference with passenger traffic, however, has excited much less alarm than the disposition exhibited in more than one State legislature to cut freight rates down to one-half of those now exacted. Those who are best acquainted with the subject question whether there is a railroad in the country which could bear such a reduction and continue to pay dividends, after defraying operation expenses and fixed charges.

It is absolutely certain that, if freight rates were diminished by one-half, it would be impossible to make the extensions of track and the additions to rolling-stock which are imperatively required in order to cope with the continually increasing demand for transportation. Some of the very States which are loudest in complaint of the inadequacy of facilities for moving their products to points of distribution or shipment, are deliberately proposing to deprive the common carriers of the means of securing the funds needed to remedy the deficiency. They seem blind to the fact, which ought to be obvious, that a railway's power of borrowing money is proportioned to its actual or probable net earnings.

It is the reckless, improvident, vindictive spirit which has characterized much of the State legislation directed against railways that is causing a certain revulsion of feeling in favor of Federal control.

More than one captain of the railway industry has gone so far as to express the wish that the States might be prohibited from legislating with reference even to the railways that lie wholly within their own borders, but which are feeders of the trunk lines. Such a prohibition, however, would require a constitutional amendment, and, even if two-thirds of both Houses of Congress should propose such a change in the Federal organic law, it is scarcely conceivable that three-fourths of the States, through their legislatures or conventions, would assent to so grave a mutilation of their powers.

On the contrary, it is extremely probable that a concerted and vigorous exercise of those powers would be advocated if the conference of Governors and State Railroad Commissioners, suggested by Governor Johnson of Minnesota, should be held, of which at present, luckily, there seems to be no likelihood. Mr.

Roosevelt's discouragement of such a conference is naturally construed as proof of his disapproval of recent State activity in anti-railway legislation.

President Roosevelt, indeed, makes no secret of his conviction that the States are not qualified for the regulative function which many of them have recently assumed, and as railway managers heartily concur in the opinion, it would surprise nobody if in the Sixtieth Congress they should decide to accept, rather than oppose, Mr. Roosevelt's plan for increasing the efficiency of Federal control, by requiring interstate railroads to obtain Federal licenses.

It is manifest that any material change in the attitude of railway corporations toward Mr. Roosevelt and his policies would have a direct and sensible effect on the next Republican National Convention, and on the President's power to influence its selection of a nominee.

Hitherto the assumption has been current that the next Convention would be divided between warm friends and implacable opponents of Mr. Roosevelt's programme; and whatever strength the candidacy of Vice-President Fairbanks, or Speaker Cannon, or Senator Foraker may have been supposed to possess should be ascribed to the belief that any one of them would be acceptable to the representatives of railway interests. If the assumption should prove unfounded, and, on the contrary, something like an accommodation between Mr. Roosevelt and the railroads should be reached, there would be comparatively little resistance to his reasonable wish that the prosecution of his policies should be committed to a successor in whom he has confidence, such a man, for example, as Judge Taft or Governor Hughes. It is a mistake, by the way, to assert, as some newspapers have asserted, that no President has ever succeeded in designating his successor.

It is true, indeed, that Grant failed in 1876 to secure the nomination of Roscoe Conkling by the Cincinnati Convention, but Jefferson indisputably brought about the selection and election of Madison by the Republican or Jeffersonian party, and it is equally certain that Andrew Jackson made Van Buren President.

Nor is it at all improbable that, if both President McKinley and Senator Hanna had lived until 1904, the former would

have made the latter the nominee of the Republican National Convention.

The state of things now existing is a counterpart of that which existed in 1808 and in 1836. Either Jefferson or Jackson could have had a nomination for a third term, had he been willing to accept one, and the same thing may undoubtedly be said of President Roosevelt.

Of the last-named fact, indeed, the evidence is accumulating every day. The legislatures of Massachusetts and South Dakota have been polled, with the result in each case that an overwhelming majority of the Republican members pronounced for Roosevelt. It is plain that, if all the Northern legislatures should pursue a similar course, the power of the President to designate the person on whom the next Republican nomination should fall would be immensely augmented. In truth, it would be practically irresistible. That is why no effort is made by Mr. Roosevelt to check such demonstrations. The best-informed persons still believe that he adheres inflexibly to his declared determination not to accept another nomination in 1908, but just because of his unshaken purpose to abide by his self-denying utterance, he is eager to see the nomination go to some one in whose adherence to the Roosevelt policies he has absolute faith. There are at least two men in whom he must feel able to repose such a trust, namely, Secretary Taft and Secretary Root, and it may be that, before a twelvemonth has elapsed, he will feel equal confidence in Governor Hughes. In respect of availability, the last of the three has, perhaps, the strongest recommendation, for he carried the State of New York by a majority more than three times as large as that which Mr. Roosevelt got in 1898; and that, too, although in 1906, every other State office was gained by a Democrat. We do not say that next year New York will prove a pivotal State, as it proved—to go no further back—in 1848, in 1880, in 1884 and in 1888; but no one will deny that its thirty-nine electoral votes will be of very great importance. They might even prove decisive, if the contest should turn, as ex-President Cleveland thinks it ought to turn, on the question of immediate tariff revision.

Much attention, by the way, is being paid in Washington to the remarkable interview with Mr. Cleveland which was published in the New York "Times" of March 4. In that interview

he reiterated his conviction that a reform of the tariff is absolutely fundamental, and that the question of the trusts is entirely dependent on it.

Owing to the fact that telegrams from Central America are generally belated and often contradictory, it has not been easy to follow the course of the struggle between Nicaragua, on the one hand, and Honduras, assisted by Salvador, on the other. Nominally, the war arose out of a boundary controversy, but really, according to the Nicaraguans, it is a struggle, on their part, for national existence, prompted by the discovery of a secret treaty, or, at all events, an informal agreement, between Honduras, Salvador and Guatemala, aimed at the mutilation, if not partition, of Nicaragua.

Thus far, curiously, the last-named State seems to have had everything its own way, in spite of the fact that Salvador kept its promise of sending 2500 soldiers, said to be well armed and tolerably trained, to assist its Honduran ally. At the hour when we write, the Caribbean port of Truxillo and many other Honduran towns of more or less importance are in the hands of the Nicaraguan invaders, and the capital, Tegucigalpa, is expected to fall from day to day. The outcome of the contest surprises many persons, because, on the face of things, Nicaragua seems to be fighting against great odds, in respect both of population and wealth. According to the latest estimates, the population of Nicaragua does not much exceed 428,000, whereas that of Honduras is over 500,000, and that of Salvador more than a million. In 1903, the latest year for which fiscal statistics are at hand, the foreign trade (exports and imports) of Nicaragua fell short of \$5,600,000, whereas that of Honduras was about \$4,350,000, and that of Salvador more than \$8,750,000. The disproportion is signal and naturally would be decisive. Nevertheless, the Nicaraguan army, small as it must be, seems capable of conquering both of its present opponents. It might not find it so easy to deal with Guatemala, which has nearly 2,000,000 inhabitants, and a foreign trade of over \$12,250,000. Our own relation to the conflict is evidently twofold: first, we cannot permit the property of American sojourners in Honduras—there are many of these—to be confiscated or damaged by Nicaraguan invaders; secondly, as proponents of the Monroe Doctrine, we are equally bound to protect the property of the subjects of European States in the

same Central American republic. If we do not afford such protection, European powers will have a right to intervene on behalf of their injured subjects, just as Great Britain intervened during Cleveland's administration, when she took possession of Nicaragua's Pacific seaport, Corinto. We desire to avert, if possible, any pretext for a repetition of that performance, or of that blockade of Venezuelan seaports which took place in 1902. There is only one way, however, of averting European interposition, and that is to interpose ourselves, though it is probable that in this instance Mexico will be invited to act conjointly with us. The co-operation of Mexico would serve to allay jealousy or suspicion on the part of the South American commonwealths, which Secretary Root took so much pains to conciliate.